

THE BIRTH OF ZEN

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Thank you for attending this Whole World is a Single Flower international Zen conference. “The Whole World is a Single Flower” is a high-class teaching by the Korean Zen Master Man Gong. After World War II, Zen Master Man Gong picked up a flower, dipped it in ink, and wrote the calligraphy “The Whole World is a Single Flower.” The meaning is equality, harmony, and peace. This means that you and me, the sun and moon, the sky and the earth, all have the same root, and are fundamentally not different, nor separate. It is the great hope and teaching of Zen Master Man Gong that all human beings return to this common root. From this root, a single, beautiful world flower of equality, harmony, and peace may again blossom. With the aim to propagate Zen Master Man Gong’s teaching, our teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn, started this Whole World is a Single Flower conference. This is a triennial event, and the very first conference was held in Korea in 1987. It has already been held six times in countries like the United States and China. It is our great honor and merit that this conference is held in Singapore this time.

When we talk about the birth of Zen, we have to start from our founder, Shakyamuni Buddha. According to historical records, the Buddha was born in Kapilavastu, India. His father was King Suddhodana, and mother was Queen Maya. The young prince led a life of luxury in the palace. Most of us would envy the luxurious life of the prince. However, the young prince had a doubt, “What is life?”, “Why must people be born, grow old, become sick, and, finally, cannot escape from death?” When he deeply realized the importance of the great affair of life and death, and that impermanence occurs swiftly, he decided to renounce worldly life, and lead a wandering life of an ascetic, in search of truth. First, he tried extreme asceticism, and subjected his body to harsh tortures. However, he was not able to attain liberation through such means. Finally, famished and weak, and nearing death, he realized that austere practices only lead to death. Therefore, he accepted some milk offered by a devotee, slowly regained his health, and decided to practice the middle path, one that avoided the

extremes of a life of luxury, and a life of self-mortification. After that, he sat underneath the bodhi tree for six years, meditating. Finally, on the morning of eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, the moment he saw the morning star, he attained enlightenment. This is what was recorded in historical records.

At that moment of enlightenment, the Buddha spontaneously exclaimed, “Wonderful! Wonderful! All beings possess Buddha-nature, it is only their illusory thoughts and attachments that prevent them from realizing it.” This means that all human beings, whether male or female, clever or dull, beautiful or ugly, all of us are fundamentally complete, just as we are. This also means that the original nature of every being is, by nature, without flaw, complete, and is no different from that of the Buddha. This proclamation by the Buddha is the highest conclusion in Buddhism. However, people nowadays lead stressed, hectic, and troubled lives. Our minds are covered by layers and layers of delusive thoughts that make our worlds upside down. Hence, we need to penetrate our false view of guilt and unsatisfactoriness, and awaken to our original purity and completeness.

The most effective way to achieve this point is through meditation. Not only did Shakyamuni Buddha himself achieve this, but also many of his disciples attained enlightenment through meditation. Moreover, since the Buddha’s parinirvana over two thousand five hundred years ago, many Buddhists in India, China, Korea, Japan, the United States, and other regions have attained enlightenment through meditation. They obtained the key, and unlocked for themselves the answers to these fundamental questions, “What is birth? What is death?” Even now, there are still many people who have attained liberation through meditation, and are able to discard suffering and worries.

Buddha held up a flower, Mahakashyapa smiled

One day, the Buddha was teaching on Vulture Peak. Many of his disciples gathered there, all ready to listen to his dharma talk. But the Buddha just sat there in silence.

Many disciples were puzzled. After a while, the Buddha lifted up a golden lotus that had been offered to him by the great Brahma king. Nobody understood the Buddha's meaning; only Mahakasyapa smiled. The Buddha then said, "I have the eye of the true dharma, the secret essence of nirvana, the formless form, the ineffable realm of dharma, not depending on words, a special transmission outside the sutras. This is already transmitted to Mahakasyapa." That day, the Buddha only held up a flower and showed it to his disciples. What exactly did he teach? A smile broke across the face of Mahakasyapa. What exactly did he attain? This kong-an marks the beginning of Zen Buddhism.

that are spoken by Zen Masters, are meant to treat the sickness of a particular person in a particular situation. The Buddha taught all dharmas to treat all minds, so if there are no minds, what use are the dharmas? Practicing Buddhists should view the "dharma as the teacher, and oneself as the light." Hence, Zen Master Ma Jo said, "The plum has ripened."

Da Mei attained enlightenment upon hearing Ma Jo's words, "Mind is Buddha," but he did not attain the words, "Mind is Buddha." These words are like a key that helped him open the door to his Buddha-nature. For another person, maybe Ma Jo would say, "Not mind, not Buddha."

This is because different people require different keys.

Once the door is opened, the key can be discarded. Da Mei said, "I don't care about 'Not mind, not Buddha,' I only care about 'Mind is Buddha!'"

Once again, I would like to express my gratitude to all the Zen Masters, monks and nuns, friends along the path, and honored guests from different countries, for coming to our Whole World is a Single Flower conference. Also, I express my gratitude for Zen Master Seung Sahn's many years of teaching. Although he is no longer with us, his dharma has already been passed on, and is teaching us the correct direction moment to moment; teaching us to clearly perceive our correct situation, function and relationship; and is helping all beings attain happiness. ☸

[21

The plum has ripened

One day, Zen Master Ma Jo heard that Da Mei (Big Plum) lived in the mountains, and sent a disciple to ask Da Mei, "What did you attain from Ma Jo, that led you to decide to stay in the mountains?"

Da Mei replied, "Ma Jo told me 'Mind is Buddha', so I came here to stay."

The disciple said, "Ma Jo no longer teaches that."

Da Mei asked, "What is his teaching now?"

The disciple replied, "Recently, Ma Jo teaches 'Not mind, not Buddha.'"

Da Mei then exclaimed, "This old man is confusing people. I don't care about 'Not mind, not Buddha,' I only care about 'Mind is Buddha!'"

Once Ma Jo heard of this, he exclaimed, "The plum has ripened."

We say there is no fixed, unchanging dharma. Words

